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ABSTRACT

Enactment of South Carolina's Education Improvement Act of 1984 taught several lessons about successful education reform. The law provides for raising student performance by increasing academic standards; strengthening the teaching and testing of basic skills; elevating the teaching profession; improving leadership, management, and fiscal efficiency; implementing quality controls and rewarding productivity; creating more effective partnerships among schools, parents, community, and business; providing school buildings conducive to improved student learning; and providing the financial support needed to improve schools. During the year required to prepare the law and obtain its passage, those involved in the reform effort ascertained that (1) educators need to learn how to work with and how to appreciate the private sector; (2) the education "family" must develop common purposes and put aside differences; (3) the public will support increased taxation if convinced school improvements will occur; (4) the governor's office and the state department of education must cooperate; (5) reform requires added effort from everyone; (6) implementation of reform is a continuing process of which enacting legislation is only a first step; and (7) comprehensive reform produces a positive spirit featuring renewed vigor and public confidence in the potential of the state's school system. (PGD)

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EDUCATION REFORM: A GOVERNOR'S VIEW

Honorable Richard W. Riley
Governor, State of South Carolina

The momentum for education reform is strong in our nation. It is particularly noticeable in the South. In recent years many states in that region have enacted extensive school reform programs. Aggresive action has occurred in Arkansas, Mississippi, Florida, North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama.

Educational Testing Service has reported the following state activities in its recent publication: Financing Excellence in Public Education:

- In North Carolina, Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. has spearheaded a number of educational reforms, including a $60 million primary reading program, a statewide program of standardized tests, and minimum competency tests in math and grammar for high school graduation. The North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics was established in a converted hospital in Durham as a residential high school serving 380 gifted students from throughout the state.
- In Arkansas -- ranked last in per-pupil expenditures and teachers' salaries — the legislature has passed the most comprehensive education program in the state's history. Teachers will be given competence tests in 1984 and forced to return to college for further training if they fail.
- In Virginia, the Board of Education, in July 1983, adopted a major overhaul of the state's public school curriculum, mandating tougher standards for high school graduation, with fewer electives and more required courses in mathematics, science, and foreign languages. The plan also includes an advanced studies diploma for college-bound students, entailing three years of high school math, science, and foreign languages.
- In Florida, the legislature, in July 1983, passed a bill that adds a seventh period to the high school day in order to accommodate new math and science

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requirements. The legislature also passed a $60-million merit-pay plan to give outstanding teachers up to $5,000 extra per year.

Nowhere, however, has the spirit of reform been so dramatically seen than in South Carolina. On June 28, 1984, I signed into law The South Carolina Education Improvement Act of 1984. Supported by a one-cent increase in the sales tax, the legislation will insure that our children and our schools will receive the financial support that they have long deserved. The Act is a statement of commitment to achieve the great leap forward to the kind of quality we know is possible. South Carolina is determined to have good schools.

The EIA is South Carolina's new approach to educational and economic excellence. The separate provisions of the law deal with:

- Raising student performance by increasing academic standards.
- Strengthening the teaching and testing of the basic skills.
- Elevating the teaching profession.
- Improving leadership, management, and fiscal efficiency.
- Implementing quality controls and rewarding productivity.
- Creating more effective partnerships among schools, parents, community, and business.
- Providing school buildings conducive to improved student learning.
- Providing financial support needed to improve schools.

The New Approach is our statement to the rest of the nation and the world. We're stating that we share a common faith in our children; that we have confidence in our potential and what we can accomplish, and that we are willing to invest the commitment, the support, and the work necessary to change our great expectations into reality.

It is also a statement of pride — an expression of determination that mediocrity will never again be tolerated. We will not be satisfied until we see progress in every county, every school district, every school, every classroom, and every child in this state.

The New Approach also represents the hard work of thousands of people during the 12-month period it took to formulate this plan and to gain its approval by the General Assembly.

From my point of view, there are some lessons to be learned from the South Carolina story:

1. Educators need to learn how to work with and how to appreciate the private sector.
2. The education family must develop common purposes and put aside differences which may divide it.
3. The general public supports increased taxation, if it is convinced that school improvement will occur.
4. The Governor's office and the State Department of Education must work together in support of school reform.
5. Education reform requires that everyone work harder at improving the schools - reform is a shared responsibility.
6. Implementation of school reform is a continuing process. Passing the legislation is only a beginning step.
7. Comprehensive school reform produces a positive spirit - a renewed vigor - a confidence in our potential and what we can accomplish.

There you have it - the seven lessons we learned in South Carolina. They are worth sharing with other states.

The Private Sector.

One of the most effective ways of increasing support for education measures is to entice the business community into a partnership with educators. At the same time, educators must begin to embrace business concepts: productivity, efficiency, cost-benefits, incentive pay programs.

The formulation of a sound relationship with the business community has a number of advantages for both businesses and schools. It recognizes the unmistakable linkage between quality of education and quality of life. It also recognizes the dramatic demographic changes in our nation. The need for schools to expand its base of support within the community.

Recently in Ohio two initiatives which would have been damaging to education were defeated. Dr. Milton Goldberg of the United States Office of Education made this statement:

> "One of the reasons for the Ohio victory is that much of the most impressive leadership for reform came from business and political leaders."

The private sector has strong interests in helping schools to improve. Educators are beginning to appreciate the private sector. They are seeing the corporate world as a friend, a free enterprise system from which much can be learned. The are understanding that while good schools are good business, the converse is also true - good business practices are good for schools.

The Education Family.

Don Cameron, Executive Director of the National Education Association has written this about the South Carolina Education Improvement Act:

"Unlike a few states, however, the legislation was carefully crafted with significant input from many constituencies - including the South Carolina Education Association - in an atomsphere of cooperation and mutual respect."

The time has come in the history of education for various groups to work together for common purposes. We were fortunte in South Carolina to unite in support of the EIA. Teachers, administrators, local board members put aside their differences and united behind the items which all could accept. In doing so each had to embrace some parts of the law which may not have been a high priority.

What we learned, however, is that there is strength in being united - that legislators are impressed when the entire education family supports a particular piece of legislation. Consensus is possible if each group is open, frank, and has a spirit of good will. That's what we have in South Carolina. The lesson is clear - the education family is more influential if it is not splintered apart into various factions. It is more powerful if teachers and administrators are allies for better schools. Consensus and common purposes should transcend differences if reform and financial support are to be established.

General Public Support.

When we first began our campaign in South Carolina few believed that the General Assembly would increase significantly the financial support for education. Few believed that the public would be in favor of increased taxes.

As the message began to be understood, however, public support intensified. Once it was established that we were serious about reform and improving the quality of schools, people everywhere began to indicate a willingness to sacrifice for better schools. The key was belief a that increased funds would mean better education for students.

A public poll taken during the campaign to pass the legislation indicated that people would support a one-cent increase in the sales tax. Those who were polled said that schools needed additional support and that improvement was worth the sacrifice of additional taxes.

What is important is that efforts are taken to inform the public, to give the public an opportunity to be heard, to have persons in every walk of life understand the issues.

In South Carolina this was done by holding seminars throughout the state. Small groups discussed the legislation, contributed to shaping the law, and debated the issues. Once people understood what had to be done and why, they exerted influence on legislators to support enactment of the EIA.

Support of the general public, coupled with support from business leaders, assured us that the law would pass.

Governor/Superintendent Partnership

As cooperation existed among educators, a high level of cooperation was demonstrated between the Governor and the State Superintendent for Education. Charlie Williams and I walked together throughout the campaign. We also had our staffs plan together, work closely with each other on various projects, and demonstrate an effective partnership.

Cooperation at this level was essential. The legislation was based on educational ideas which had been proposed by the State Superintendent. The Governor's office was able to obtain political leadership in the General Assembly to translate educational ideas into reform legislation.

The Governor/Superintendent partnership was maintained throughout the campaign. Both appeared on public programs, participated in seminars, visited with business leaders, and influenced legislators. Unity at the top was illustrative of what had to be done at every level - cooperation, good will, common purposes, consensus, and concentration on the needs of students above everything else.

Shared Responsibility.

Improving schools is a shared responsibility. It cannot be done by educators

alone. It requires the help of parents, of volunteers, of the private sector, and of legislators. It is a responsibility that belongs to all the people, including students. It requires that all contribute to effective schools - teachers, parents, citizens, students, government officials, business leaders. Each has a personal obligation to contribute in a positive manner to improve our schools.

We need to stop placing blame on any one group and do whatever we can to be helpful. Schools need all the help they can get, and our job is to stay involved, work out the problems, contribute to quality, assist students to learn, and motivate the entire educational system to do a better job.

By sharing the responsibility we all become accountable for improved schools. The sooner we sense that obligation, the quicker will our children be better educated. It is a lesson we have learned in South Carolina.

Implementation Process.

Passing an educational reform bill is a first step to improving schools. The harder work comes in implementing the legislation. What is required in laws needs to be transformed into educational programs for students. It requires that the partnerships established to enact the law continue to be active in implementing the law.

As the educators translate law into programs, others should assist in clarifying problems, in mitigating difficulties, in helping people to understand change. It is particularly important that the private sector stay involved. It is an opportunity for business leaders to contribute more directly to school improvement. It is a way of saying that the business world is determined to have good schools. It is a way of indicating continuing support for reform and higher quality.

The effective implementation of law is the basis for success and satisfaction.

A Positive Spirit.

The passage of a comprehensive school reform program in South Carolina has produced a new confidence in our people. There is a positive spirit in the state - a belief in our ability to do something great.

The education reform program is a symbol to our people of progress in South Carolina. It is a symbol to the business world of increased economic activity. It is a symbol to parents of better education for their children. It is a symbol to students that learning is serious business. To all of us it marks a milestone in our history. It is a challenge to establish quality education for all our children.

The spirit is seen at school meetings, at gatherings of educators, at civic club luncheons, in the offices of chambers of commerce, in the State Department of Education, among teachers, and in many other places. The spirit is one of saying that as we succeeded in implementing the law, we can now succeed in making good schools a reality of our future.

Conclusion.

The momentum for education reform will continue to intensify. Parents, business leaders, students, educators, and citizens want and deserve good schools. All are willing to support additional taxes if we are serious about reform and improvement.

South Carolina has a New Approach to quality. It is based on some important lessons we learned on the way to passing The South Carolina Education Improvement Act of 1984. It is working for us. It may also work for others.